

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A method for a financial services provider to securely process corporate payment requests over a computer network, comprising the steps of:

issuing a primary digital certificate to a primary certificate holder of a corporation, the primary certificate being configured to authorize the primary certificate holder to designate a plurality of holders of secondary digital certificates that are derivative from the primary certificate, each of the primary and plurality of secondary certificates including unique identifying information and an indication of authority of the holder of the certificate that includes ~~at least one of~~ a predetermined maximum payment that the holder of the certificate is authorized to validate and an identification of payees for which the certificate holder is authorized to validate payments, an authority defined in each of the secondary digital certificates being comparatively more limited than an authority defined in the primary digital certificate;

collecting, over the computer network, pending corporate payment requests for clearing against an account of the corporation;

periodically generating a pending payment statement that includes the collected pending payment requests;

requiring that each of the collected pending payment requests be validated by an authenticated secondary certificate holder having the authority to validate the payment requests up to the predetermined maximum payment and for the identified payees included in the indication of authority of the secondary certificate issued to the authenticated secondary certificate holder, and

clearing only validated corporate payment requests of the pending payment statement against the corporate account.

2. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein the primary certificate includes both an identifying information uniquely identifying an officer of the corporation and the authority of the officer.

3. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein the primary certificate includes the identifying information uniquely identifying an officer of the corporation and wherein the authority of the officer is stored by the financial services provider.

4. **(Original)** The method of claim 3, wherein the requiring step includes steps of:
receiving the primary certificate from the primary certificate holder or one of the secondary certificates from one of the secondary certificate holders;
authenticating an identity of the certificate holder from which the certificate was received,
and
validating the presented certificate.

5. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein the primary digital certificate includes the authority of an officer of the corporation and wherein the identifying information uniquely identifying the officer is stored by the financial services provider.

6. **(Canceled)**

7. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving a list of validated corporate payment requests from an authenticated certificate holder of the corporation and clearing only those corporate payment requests against the corporate account that are listed in the received list of validated corporate payment requests.

8. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein the requiring step includes a step of validating the collected pending payment requests of the pending payment statement at least partially programmatically.

9. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein the requiring step validates each pending payment requests in the pending payment statement by matching the payment request with a corresponding payment request in an accounting system of the corporation.

10. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein the pending payment statement generating step generates the pending payment statement at a regular interval.

11. **(Original)** The method of claim 1, wherein the regular interval is one of daily and weekly.

12. **(Currently Amended)** A computer system configured to enable a financial services provider to securely process corporate payment requests over a computer network, comprising:

at least one processor;

at least one data storage device;

a plurality of processes spawned by said at least one processor, the processes including processing logic for:

issuing a primary certificate to a primary certificate holder of a corporation, the primary certificate being configured to authorize the primary certificate holder to designate a plurality of holders of secondary digital certificates that are derivative from the primary digital certificate, each of the primary and plurality of secondary certificates including unique identifying information and

an indication of authority of the holder of the certificate that includes ~~at least one of~~ a maximum payment that the holder of the certificate is authorized to validate and an identification of payees for which the certificate holder is authorized to validate payments, an authority defined in each of the secondary digital certificates being comparatively more limited than an authority defined in the primary digital certificate;

collecting, over the computer network, pending corporate payment requests for clearing against an account of the corporation;

periodically generating a pending payment statement that includes the collected pending payment requests;

requiring that each of the collected pending payment requests be validated by an authenticated secondary certificate holder having the authority to validate the payment requests up to the predetermined maximum payment and for the identified payees included in the indication of authority of the secondary certificate issued to the authenticated secondary certificate holder, and

clearing only validated corporate payment requests of the pending payment statement against the corporate account.

13. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, wherein the primary digital certificate includes both an identifying information uniquely identifying an officer of the corporation and the authority of the officer.

14. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, wherein the primary digital certificate includes the identifying information uniquely identifying an officer of the corporation and wherein the authority of the officer is stored by the financial services provider.

15. **(Original)** The system of claim 14, wherein the requiring step includes steps of:
receiving the primary certificate from the primary certificate holder or one of the secondary certificates from one of the secondary certificate holders;
authenticating an identity of the certificate holder from which the certificate was received,
and
validating the presented certificate.

16. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, wherein the primary digital certificate includes the authority of an officer of the corporation and wherein the identifying information uniquely identifying the officer is stored by the financial services provider.

17. **(Canceled)**

18. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, further comprising the step of receiving a list of validated corporate payment requests from an authenticated certificate holder of the corporation and clearing only those corporate payment requests against the corporate account that are listed in the received list of validated corporate payment requests.

19. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, wherein the requiring step includes a step of validating the collected pending payment requests of the pending payment statement at least partially programmatically.

20. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, wherein the requiring step validates each pending payment requests in the pending payment statement by matching the payment request with a corresponding payment request in an accounting system of the corporation.

21. **(Original)** The system of claim 20, wherein access to the accounting system of the corporation is by presentment of the primary certificate or one of the secondary certificates.

22. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, wherein the pending payment statement generating step generates the pending payment statement at a regular interval.

23. **(Original)** The system of claim 12, wherein the regular interval is one of daily and weekly.

24. **(Currently Amended)** A machine-readable medium having data stored thereon representing sequences of instructions which, when executed by computing device, causes said computing device to enable a financial services provider to securely process corporate payment requests over the computer network by performing the steps of:

issuing a primary certificate to a primary certificate holder of a corporation, the primary certificate being configured to authorize the primary certificate holder to designate a plurality of holders of secondary digital certificates that are derivative from the primary digital certificate, each of the primary and plurality of secondary certificates including unique identifying information and an indication of authority of the holder of the certificate that includes ~~at least one~~ of a maximum payment that the holder of the certificate is authorized to validate and an identification of payees for which the certificate holder is authorized to validate payments, an authority defined in each of the secondary digital certificates being comparatively more limited than an authority defined in the primary digital certificate;

collecting, over the computer network, pending corporate payment requests for clearing against an account of the corporation;

periodically generating a pending payment statement that includes the collected pending payment requests;

requiring that each of the collected pending payment requests be validated by an authenticated secondary certificate holder having the authority to validate the payment requests up to the predetermined maximum payment and for the identified payees included in the indication of authority of the secondary certificate issued to the authenticated secondary certificate holder, and

clearing only validated corporate payment requests of the pending payment statement against the corporate account.

25. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, wherein the primary digital certificate includes both an identifying information uniquely identifying an officer of the corporation and the authority of the officer.

26. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, wherein the primary digital certificate includes the identifying information uniquely identifying an officer of the corporation and wherein the authority of the officer is stored by the financial services provider.

27. **(Original)** The medium of claim 26, wherein the requiring step includes steps of:
receiving the primary certificate from the primary certificate holder or one of the secondary certificates from one of the secondary certificate holders;
authenticating an identity of the certificate holder from which the certificate was received,
and
validating the presented certificate.

28. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, wherein the primary digital certificate includes the authority of an officer of the corporation and wherein the identifying information uniquely identifying the officer is stored by the financial services provider.

29. **(Canceled)**

30. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, further comprising the step of receiving a list of validated corporate payment requests from an authenticated certificate holder of the corporation and clearing only those corporate payment requests against the corporate account that are listed in the received list of validated corporate payment requests.

31. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, wherein the requiring step includes a step of validating the collected pending payment requests of the pending payment statement at least partially programmatically.

32. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, wherein the requiring step validates each pending payment requests in the pending payment statement by matching the payment request with a corresponding payment request in an accounting system of the corporation.

33. **(Original)** The medium of claim 32, wherein access to the accounting system of the corporation is by presentment of the primary certificate or one of the secondary certificates.

34. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, wherein the pending payment statement generating step generates the pending payment statement at a regular interval.

35. **(Original)** The medium of claim 24, wherein the regular interval is one of daily and weekly.

36. **(Withdrawn)** A method for securing payments of a corporation, comprising the steps of:

receiving a primary certificate from a financial services provider (FSP);

assigning the primary certificate to a primary certificate holder of the corporation, the primary certificate authorizing the primary certificate holder to designate a plurality of holders of secondary digital certificates that are derivative from the primary digital certificate, each of the primary and plurality of secondary certificates including at least one of unique identifying information and an indication of an authority of the holder of the certificate;

periodically accessing a pending payment statement generated by the FSP upon presentation of the primary or one of the secondary certificates and successful authentication by the FSP, the pending payment statement including at least one pending payment request of the corporation collected by the FSP;

matching each of the at least one pending corporate payment requests against a record of a corresponding entry in an accounting system of the corporation;

validating only those corporate payment requests having corresponding entries in the accounting system, a validation of each collected pending payment request by an authenticated certificate holder being a condition precedent to the payment request clearing an account of the corporation at the FSP.

37. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 36, wherein access to the accounting system of the corporation is by presentment of the primary certificate or one of the secondary certificates.

38. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 36, wherein the periodic accessing step is carried out every day.

39. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 36, wherein the periodic accessing step includes a step of logging onto a Web site of the FSP.

40. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 36, wherein the periodic accessing step includes a step of receiving and opening an electronic file sent by the FSP, the electronic file including the pending payment statement generated by the FSP.

41. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 36, wherein each certificate holder is limited to validating only those pending payment requests that are within a scope of the authority indicated in the certificate.

42. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 36, further including a step of changing a scope of the authority of a certificate holder upon changing a status of the holder within the corporation.

43. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 42, wherein changing the scope of authority of a certificate holder includes a step of revoking the certificate of the holder.

44. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 43, further including a step of issuing a new secondary certificate to the holder of the revoked certificate, the new secondary certificate including an indication of the changed authority.

45. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 36, wherein the indication of authority includes at least one of: a maximum payment that the holder of the certificate is authorized to validate, an expiration date of the certificate, payees for which the certificate holder is authorized to validate payments.

46. **(Withdrawn)** A computer system configured for securing payments of a corporation, comprising:

at least one processor;

at least one data storage device;

a plurality of processes spawned by said at least one processor, the processes including processing logic for:

receiving a primary certificate from a financial services provider (FSP);

assigning the primary certificate to a primary certificate holder of the corporation, the primary certificate authorizing the primary certificate holder to designate a plurality of holders of secondary digital certificates that are derivative from the primary digital certificate, each of the primary and plurality of secondary certificates including at least one of unique identifying information and an indication of an authority of the holder of the certificate;

periodically accessing a pending payment statement generated by the FSP upon presentation of the primary or one of the secondary certificates and successful authentication by the FSP, the pending payment statement including at least one pending payment request of the corporation collected by the FSP;

matching each of the at least one pending corporate payment requests against a record of a corresponding entry in an accounting system of the corporation;

validating only those corporate payment requests having corresponding entries in the accounting system, a validation of each collected pending payment request by an authenticated certificate holder being a condition precedent to clearing an account of the corporation at the FSP.

47. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 46, wherein access to the accounting system of the corporation is by presentment of the primary certificate or one of the secondary certificates.

48. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 46, wherein the periodic accessing step is carried out every day.

49. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 46, wherein the periodic accessing step includes a step of logging onto a Web site of the FSP.

50. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 46, wherein the periodic accessing step includes a step of receiving and opening an electronic file sent by the FSP, the electronic file including the pending payment statement generated by the FSP.

51. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 46, wherein each certificate holder is limited to validating only those pending payment requests that are within a scope of the authority indicated in the certificate.

52. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 46, further including a step of changing a scope of the authority of a certificate holder upon changing a status of the holder within the corporation.

53. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 52, wherein changing the scope of authority of a certificate holder includes a step of revoking the certificate of the holder.

54. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 53, further including a step of issuing a new secondary certificate to the holder of the revoked certificate, the new secondary certificate including an indication of the changed authority.

55. **(Withdrawn)** The computer system of claim 46, wherein the indication of authority includes at least one of: a maximum payment that the holder of the certificate is authorized to validate, an expiration date of the certificate, payees for which the certificate holder is authorized to validate payments.

56. **(Withdrawn)** A machine-readable medium having data stored thereon representing sequences of instructions which, when executed by computing device, causes said computing device to secure payments of a corporation by performing the steps of:

receiving a primary certificate from a financial services provider (FSP);

assigning the primary certificate to a primary certificate holder of the corporation, the primary certificate authorizing the primary certificate holder to designate a plurality of holders of secondary digital certificates that are derivative from the primary digital certificate, each of the primary and plurality of secondary certificates including at least one of unique identifying information and an indication of an authority of the holder of the certificate;

periodically accessing a pending payment statement generated by the FSP upon presentation of the primary or one of the secondary certificates and successful authentication by the FSP, the

pending payment statement including at least one pending payment request of the corporation collected by the FSP;

matching each of the at least one pending corporate payment requests against a record of a corresponding entry in an accounting system of the corporation;

validating only those corporate payment requests having corresponding entries in the accounting system, a validation of each collected pending payment request by an authenticated certificate holder being a condition precedent to clearing an account of the corporation at the FSP.

57. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 56, wherein access to the accounting system of the corporation is by presentment of the primary certificate or one of the secondary certificates.

58. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 56, wherein the periodic accessing step is carried out every day.

59. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 56, wherein the periodic accessing step includes a step of logging onto a Web site of the FSP.

60. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 56, wherein the periodic accessing step includes a step of receiving and opening an electronic file sent by the FSP, the electronic file including the pending payment statement generated by the FSP.

61. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 56, wherein each certificate holder is limited to validating only those pending payment requests that are within a scope of the authority indicated in the certificate.

62. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 56, further including a step of changing a scope of the authority of a certificate holder upon changing a status of the holder within the corporation.

63. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 62, wherein changing the scope of authority of a certificate holder includes a step of revoking the certificate of the holder.

64. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 63, further including a step of issuing a new secondary certificate to the holder of the revoked certificate, the new secondary certificate including an indication of the changed authority.

65. **(Withdrawn)** The medium of claim 56, wherein the indication of authority includes at least one of: a maximum payment that the holder of the certificate is authorized to validate, an expiration date of the certificate, payees for which the certificate holder is authorized to validate payments.